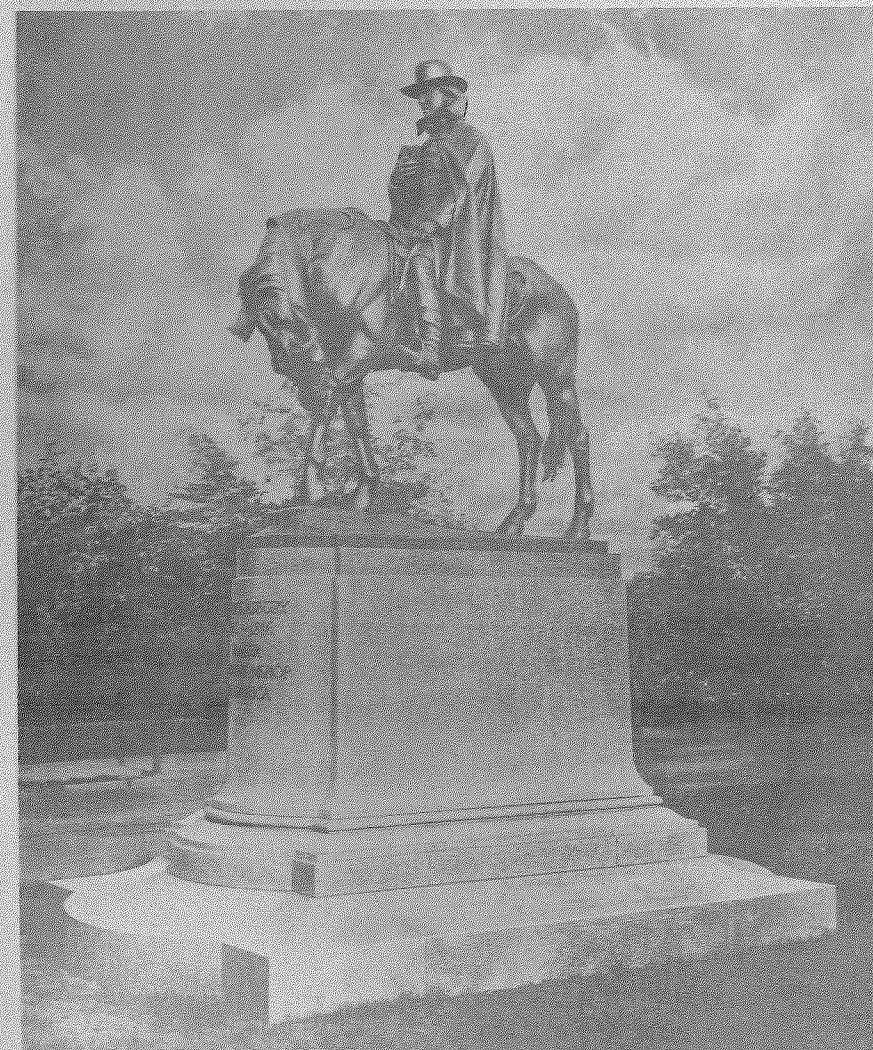


Famous scene in Lovely Lane Meeting House, Baltimore, on December 27, 1784, shows Bishop Thomas Coke (hand upraised), E.U.B. founder Philip Otterbein, and others ordaining Francis Asbury.

THE HISTORICAL TRAIL



Bishop Francis Asbury Bicentennial Issue — 1971

The Historical Trail

Yearbook of the Historical Society of the
Southern New Jersey Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

FOREWORD

The Southern New Jersey Conference Historical Society is pleased to present this 9th edition of THE HISTORICAL TRAIL. It is also fitting that we dedicate it as an Asbury edition in this year that commemorates the 200th Anniversary of his coming to America.

Bishop Francis Asbury had a great influence on early Methodism in New Jersey. His fame spread far and wide. He travelled the roads and paths of our State from one end to the other. He bathed in our ocean. He tasted of our hospitality. He felt the sting of our mosquitoes. He praised our goodness and condemned our uncouthness. He loved our people and they loved him. So, in his honor we have named streets, sons, churches and communities.

We are pleased this year to share our book with the Northern New Jersey Conference Historical Society. The article on Asbury by Dr. Henry Lyle Lambdin is their contribution and this publication is a joint venture with them. The common heritage we share and witness to Christ we bear in the respective parts of our State brings us closer together in Him.

The authors are to be congratulated for their contributions to this Asbury Bicentennial Issue. Dr. Henry Lyle Lambdin is at Drew University. Dr. Howard Shipps is Professor of Church History at Asbury Theological Seminary and a ministerial member of the Southern New Jersey Conference. Dr. Andrew C. Braun is minister of the Broad Street United Methodist Church in Burlington and long a lover of Asbury. The Rev. J. H. Coffee, Jr. is a 1971 graduate of Asbury Seminary and will receive an appointment in the Southern New Jersey Conference this June.

May this Asbury issue of THE HISTORICAL TRAIL bring our heritage of faith more alive. As you read of the "Prophet of the Long Road" may his example inspire you to live for Christ today as he did in his day, and may we strive to bring others so to do.

ROBERT B. STEELMAN
President

BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY

by

ROBERT BEVIS STEELMAN

A Biographical Sketch

His appointment read America. They called him "this man that rambles through the United States." It was said of him that "he printed the map of his ministry with the hoofs of his horse." He deserved the accolade, "Prophet of the Long Road." Shortly before his death he told a British Correspondent that his mailing address was simply "America." Any postmaster would know that he would soon pass that way.

The place of Francis Asbury in the annals of American history is secure. For 45 years this pioneer, circuit-riding bishop was the moving figure of American Methodism. When he set foot in Philadelphia on October 27, 1771, there were less than 1,000 Methodists in all the colonies and not even 200 in New Jersey. When he died in 1816 there were more than 200,000 people called Methodists from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico from the Atlantic Ocean to lands west of the Mississippi.

During his American itinerant ministry he travelled some 270,000 miles or 6,000 miles a year, and this mostly on horseback. He rode the circuits from Maine to Georgia from New Jersey to Kentucky and Tennessee. He preached a total of between 16,000 and 17,000 sermons, an average of one a day. He presided over no less than 224 Annual Conferences and ordained more than 4,000 preachers.

President Calvin Coolidge said of him on the occasion of the dedication of his equestrian statute in our Nation's Capitol that: "His outposts marched with the pioneers, his missionaries visited the hovels of the poor, that all might be brought to a knowledge of the truth. . . . Who shall say where his influence, written on the immortal souls of men, shall end? . . . It is more than probable that Nancy Hicks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln, had heard him in her youth. Adams and Jefferson must have known him; and Jackson must have seen in him a flaming spirit as unconquerable as his own. . . . He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation."

Francis Asbury was born August 20, 1745 in Handsworth, Staffordshire near Birmingham, England. His parents were Joseph and Elizabeth. Joseph Asbury was a middle class farmer and gardner who moved his family to West Bromwich, just west of Birmingham when Francis was a small boy. Only one other child, a daughter, was born to Elizabeth, but she died at an

early age so Francis was virtually an only child. His boyhood home in West Bromwich is still there, owned by the town fathers and preserved as a Methodist shrine. In it one can still see the fireplace seat where Frank, as his British friends called him, sat by the hours reading his Bible.

Asbury's education was sparse for good teachers were hard to come by. But he loved to read and good books were always his friends.

At the age of 13½ he was apprenticed at the Old Forge which was owned by a Methodist named Foxall. Foxall's son Henry and Francis became good friends. Years later Henry Foxall, a rich iron merchant in America, built Foundry Church in Washington, D.C., dedicated by Bishop Asbury in 1810. Shortly after becoming an apprentice the young Francis was spiritually awakened through contacts with the Methodists. His parents also joining the Methodists, Francis soon began to publically read the Bible, pray and occasionally expound the meaning of Scripture, especially when attending one of his mother's prayer groups.

In his Journal on February 22, 1795 Asbury describes his early experiences in England: "I was awakened (as I think), when about thirteen years six months old; at the age of sixteen I began to read and pray, in the public congregation; one year six months after this, publicly to exhort and expound God's holy word; at twenty-one I travelled much; and in the beginning of my twenty-second year, I travelled altogether. I was nine months in Staffordshire, and other adjoining shires; two years in Bedfordshire Circuit, and two in Salisbury Circuit."

At the Bristol Conference on August 7, 1771 Francis Asbury volunteered to go to America. After a brief visit home to say goodbye to his parents he returned to Bristol and from there set sail for America on September 4th. His travelling companion was another Methodist itinerant, Richard Wright.

Aboard ship he wrote the following: "I will set down a few things that lie on my mind. Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honour? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No: I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do."

The rough voyage lasted 54 days. During this time he spent much time reading, preached frequently to the ship's crew and other passengers and began keeping his Journal. The voyage ended when they landed at Philadelphia, October 27, 1771. The next day Asbury preached his first sermon in America in Old St. George's Church.

When he first arrived in America, Asbury was under the direction of

Richard Boardman, John Wesley's assistant in this country. He spent his time in the areas around the three cities of Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore and points in between. But the city was only the focal point for his work. He spent much time in the country and had little time for the preachers who only wanted to stay in the towns. November 21, 1771 he wrote: "At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My Brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way."

Asbury replaced Boardman as assistant in October of 1772. On the 10th he writes, "I received a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he required a strict attention to discipline; and appointed me to act as assistant."

This appointment was not long lasting. About 8 months later Asbury was disappointedly replaced by Thomas Rankin as Wesley's assistant. Rankin went back to England in 1777 and the job as Methodist's number 1 leader in America was Asbury's for keeps.

Asbury set foot in Virginia for the first time at Norfolk on May 29, 1775. From then on his mind and heart were set on the larger work for God on this continent. Yet he was not always able to be much about.

The Revolutionary War, particularly in the early years, were hard on the Methodists. Their allegiance to John Wesley in England coupled with his well-known pro-English views made it hard on all Methodists. Francis Asbury, alone of all the ministers from England, remained in this country.

Most of 1778 and 1779 Asbury was in semi-hiding at the Eastern Shore Peninsula home of Judge Thomas White near the Maryland-Delaware line. But he kept busy studying, reading his Bible and preaching when he could, though decrying the "dumb" Sabbaths when he was unable to preach. His host had it even harder than Asbury through arrests and harrassments for about a year. And all for harbouring the Methodists. Would you believe it though, it has been stated that during those 2 years of 'political exile' that Asbury won over eighteen hundred souls to Christ. How he was used of God!

The War over, the great task was to build a Nation and a Church. The Methodist people wanted the full rites of a church, but had no ordained clergy. And there were few of other denominations available or willing to help. Asbury had tremendous difficulties in keeping the Societies together. John Wesley recognized the difficulties and the peculiar situation in which American Methodists found themselves as compared with those in Great Britain. Accordingly, in 1784 Wesley drew up plans for the organization of

American Methodism into a Church, made arrangements for an ordained clergy, and prepared church rituals, an order of worship and articles of religion.

Wesley's emissary with these plans was Thomas Coke. Asbury and Coke first met on Sunday, November 14, 1784 in Barratt's Chapel near Fredericka, Delaware. When informed of the plans Asbury said, "I was shocked. . . . It may be of God." Informed that Wesley was appointing him as Superintendent of the work, Asbury agreed only if the other preachers elected him.

Immediately plans were set afoot to call a General Conference of all preachers to meet in Baltimore at Christmas. Freeborn Garrettson was sent out "like an arrow" to summon the men. The Conference convened in the Lovely Lane Meeting House on December 24th. Asbury says, "It was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders and deacons. Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the Church, and my ordination followed." Asbury was ordained Deacon on Christmas Day, Elder on the 26th and consecrated Superintendent (they soon called themselves bishops, much to the chagrin of Wesley) the following day.

From here on Bishop Francis Asbury was strictly a man of the road. The first of his 224 Conferences convened at the home of Major Green Hill, one mile from Louisburg in North Carolina on March 19, 1785. This home, still standing, is now one of the shrines of the United Methodist Church. This particular Conference represented the 31 circuits and 9,063 members of the Carolinas and Virginia. There were about 20 preachers in attendance.

In May of 1785 Dr. Coke and Asbury visited General Washington at his Mount Vernon home to discuss with him the slavery question. On June 5th Asbury laid the cornerstone for Cokesbury College in Abingdon, Maryland. July 9th while preaching at Peter Dewit's in West Virginia he recorded his first baptisms west of the mountains. Asbury was back in Baltimore August 4, in Philadelphia the 25th of the same month and at New York on the 31st. Most of September he was in New Jersey travelling with "Black Harry" Hosier and spent several days at a Quarterly Meeting in Port Elizabeth. November found the bishop in Virginia busy raising money for Cokesbury College and arranging the Book of Discipline for the people called Methodists. December found him in North Carolina. Thus did Asbury spend his first years as a bishop.

He was constantly on the go, sick or well, and he was often quite unwell. The saddle was more his home than any place else. He preached

nearly every day. He stayed wherever he happened to be and he was equally at home in the homes of the great like Governors Van Cortland of New York, Bassett of Delaware and Tiffin of Ohio as he was in the cabins of the pioneer, but more than once he was constrained to complain of the poor lodgings and the rigors of travel. He would be up north in the summer and travel south in the winter. But almost always on the go.

We cannot today conceive the hardships of his incredible journeys. But they are all described in his Journal. On his first visit to Nashville, Tennessee he had to sleep in the jail. Once he slept with 16 adults and several children in seven beds in one vermin-infested room.

He was one of the best known men in all America. Elmer Clark says, "He travelled more, knew more people, had a better knowledge of the roads and trails, towns and villages, than any man in all the land."

Consider Asbury's journey's for just one year—1809—as an example of the bishop at work.

January 1, 1809 Asbury left the site of the just held South Carolina Conference in Georgia. Travelling with him was Henry Boehm who was to become one of the charter members of the New Jersey Conference. Bishop William McKendree on his first round of episcopal visits travelled a lot of the time with Asbury too.

During the year Asbury held Conferences in Tarboro, North Carolina, Harrisonburg, Virginia, Old St. George's Church Philadelphia, John Street Church New York, Manmouth, Maine, the Western Conference, at Cincinnati, and the South Carolina Conference in Charleston.

What a tour for a man of 64. Sick or well he seldom rested. Because of his infirmities he sometimes rode in a kind of sulkey, but mostly on horseback.

He travelled through 19 states from Georgia to Maine and on to Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee.

Imagine in 1809 when roads were poor at best, and often mere trails, crossing the White Mountains of New Hampshire, roaming through the Poconoes, crossing the Alleghenies from Lancaster to Pittsburg and Wheeling and skirting the Smoky Mountains as he crossed from Tennessee to North Carolina.

No wonder he said, "I have need of patience and courage for the roads

and weather." Bad roads or no roads, snow or rain seldom detained the bishop on his appointed rounds.

In March while riding through Delaware he wrote: "I have suffered incredibly by the cold in the last hundred and thirty miles: souls and their Saviour can reward me, and nothing else! Lord, remember Francis Asbury in all his labours and afflictions!"

On his visit to Capt. Beal at Fort Wolcott near Newport, Rhode Island on May 29 he said, "I preached to the soldiers; baptized some children; visited the school; prayed with the sick in the hospital; exhorted the poor sinners to turn to God; but I might have said and done more."

He had quite some experiences. At Beverly, Massachusetts he said, "my host did not quite understand praying in the daytime."

During an 8 day span in New York State in July he preached on Monday in Hampton Church, Tuesday in Dr. Lawrence store to about 500, Wednesday in M'Gready's barn, next day in a barroom, Sunday in a woods to about 1,000 and next day in Favill's barn. Anyplace was good enough for Asbury to expound God's Word and preach Jesus.

One night near Manlius, New York they stopped at the one room cabin where only a lady was present. Wrote Asbury, "I lay along the floor, in my clothes. There was a lady in the corner, and brother Boehm in bed, LIKE A GENTLEMAN. The female could not possibly occasion reproach, and so I was persuaded; but I wished I was somewhere else: my fear was not commendable."

Of particular interest to us in southern New Jersey was his 23 day tour in April when he preached at Carpenter's Bridge, (Mantua), Aura, Pittsgrove, Centerton, Cohansey (Bridgeton), Port Elizabeth, Head of the River, Mays Landing, Blackman's (English Creek), Absecon, Pleasant Mills (he dedicated the church on this visit and stayed at the Batsto mansion), Tuckerton, Waretown, Lanoka Harbor, Silverton, Manasquan, Newman's (near Hamilton), Peter White's (Ocean Grove), Long Branch, Shrewsbury, Mount Pleasant (Matawan) and New Brunswick.

The opening sermon of the Western Conference, meeting for the first time in Cincinnati, was preached by Learner Blackman, native of New Jersey. Asbury had stayed in April at his father's home in English Creek and remarked about Learner. At the same Conference John Collins, Learner's brother-in-law, was ordained elder. He too was a native of South Jersey and Learner Blackman was converted by the first sermon he ever preached.

Bishop Asbury continued to travel as long as he lived. His last Journal entry was made at Granby, South Carolina on December 7, 1815. He was sick, but he travelled on. Elmer Clark has retraced his last journey for us. He did not make the South Carolina Conference nor the Virginia one, though he travelled when he could. He hoped to make the General Conference set for May 1st in Baltimore.

In Richmond, Virginia, he preached his last sermon, seated on a table and supported by pillows. Six miles south of Spottsylvania, Virginia Asbury could go no further. At the home of an old friend George Arnold he lingered for two days, dying March 31, 1816—full of confidence and hope, trying in the gathering mists of death to take up a missionary collection—a preacher to the end.

Asbury's remains are buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery, Baltimore.

Thus did he live, thus did he ride, thus did he preach, thus did he die. Francis Asbury was the greatest figure ever in American Methodism.



FRANCIS ASBURY AS HENRY BOEHM KNEW HIM

by

HOWARD FENIMORE SHIPPS, S.T.D.

The purpose of this writing is to have a look at Methodism's first general superintendent through the eyes and mind of one who no doubt knew him more intimately than anyone during Asbury's entire life. Henry, the son of Martin Boehm, was born at Conestoga, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, June 8, 1775. He was led in the paths of righteousness from the days of his early childhood, and he was genuinely converted and called to the gospel ministry in his youth. Upon answering this call of God he gave himself henceforth to an active, fruitful, triumphant service to Christ and the Church until his death in 1875. Thus his life span covered the first three generations of Methodism in America. This was a most significant period in which to discover the nature and meaning and original purpose of this new movement within the general Christian community.

The Boehms were of Pietistic and Mennonite background. Martin early in life embraced the religion of his fathers and in 1756 was chosen by lot to be a Mennonite preacher. According to his youngest son, Henry,

he preached for six years without a knowledge of sins forgiven. But in 1761 he found redemption in the blood of the Lamb, and then he became a flame of fire, and preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. His success was wonderful, and the seals to his ministry were numerous. Then the Mennonites expelled him for being too evangelical. He then joined the United Brethren, and afterward became a member of The Methodist Episcopal Church.¹

Henry also said of his father,

He had strong common sense, and well understood the science of family government. The order and discipline of the family attracted the attention of the apostolic Asbury, and he made mention of it in preaching my father's funeral sermon.²

Henry Boehm from the time of his early childhood remembers very vividly the frequent and impressive visits of Father Asbury, as he was affectionately called by those who knew him best. These occasions were times of

¹ Henry Boehm, REMINISCENSES OF REV. HENRY BOEHM (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1866), p. 12.

² Ibid, p. 12.

great excitement among the members and friends of the Boehm family. Likewise they were usually times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord at first in the family house and later in the Meeting House which Father Boehm had provided for the Lord's people. Asbury was always the eagerly awaited messenger of God's good news at this sacred place among the German Methodists. And this marks the beginning of a very intimate and long continued spiritual affinity between the great apostle of American Methodism and the young apostle of German Methodism in America.

The life of Henry Boehm was strategically placed in relation to the origin and progress of the Methodist movement during the first three generations. Boehm speaks for himself when he says,

I was born in June of 1775 which was immediately after the battle of Lexington, and one year before the Declaration of Independence. Thus I saw the birth of our nation, and have lived under the first President, George Washington, and sixteen of his successors, to Andrew Johnson. I was born nine years before the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, and have known all its bishops, from Thomas Coke, the first, to Calvin Kingsley, the last elected, 1864. My memory goes back over eighty years. I recollect when they traveled out West to Fort Pitt, now Pittsburg, on 'pack horses.' The roads, if we may call them roads, for they were mere paths through the wilderness, were so rough that they could not be traveled any other way.³

He gives an introductory account of the beginning of this tour when he states in his Reminiscences,⁴

On Monday, August 17, we started on the last tour I made with the bishop. The next Monday we went to Pipe Creek and attended a camp-meeting there. Then we started West, and the bishop remarked, 'There was a strange medley of preachers, drovers, beasts on four legs, and beasts made by wisky on two, traveling on the turnpike at one time.'

Their travel during the next eight months took them six thousand miles while they attended and conducted nine conferences and ten camp meetings. At the conclusion of the year Boehm describes his tour with the bishop as a season exceedingly trying and grueling for both soul and body. During this year they succeeded in visiting all the conferences in the connection, preached the gospel in fifteen states, and had become acquainted with the great men of Methodism in the ministry and laity East, West, North, and South.

³ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴ Ibid, p. 405.

At the Philadelphia Conference which was started on April 24, 1813, it was the judgment of both bishops, Asbury and McKendree, that the ministry of Boehm was needed among the German-speaking Methodists of Pennsylvania. This young German's ability to preach in the native tongue and to communicate with great effect among those of his own race, made him a rare instrument in the hands of the church to be used among the citizens of Pennsylvania at this particular time. Thus the decision was made that he should cease to accompany the bishop as he had been doing during the past five years.

Asbury always held the younger Boehm in highest esteem and with implicit confidence. He saw in him the God-sent instrument without whom it would have been impossible for the Bishop to have accomplished his mission in America. Throughout these years he not only preserved his life in times of sickness and utter weakness, but upon several occasions saved him from accidental death. At the time of their parting on separate missions Asbury declared to the brethren assembled in conference at Old Saint Georges Church in Philadelphia, "For five years he has been my constant companion. He served me as a son; he served me as a brother; he served me as a servant; he served me as a slave." The evidence of such complete confidence which Asbury placed in him is seen in the fact that within six weeks following this parting Boehm was appointed as one of the executors of his last will and testament.

How Boehm Saw Him—Near the close of his REMINISCENCES, Boehm devotes an entire chapter to his understanding and evaluation of the character and life of the one man he knew better than any other, save that of his own father. Let us now seek to share in this picture of Francis Asbury so elaborately drawn by his closest companion and most trusted friend. He begins by describing the bishop's physical appearance in the following paragraph.⁵

Bishop Asbury was five feet nine inches high, weighed one hundred and fifty-two pounds, erect in person, and of a very commanding appearance. His features were rugged, but his countenance was intelligent, though time and care had furrowed it deep with wrinkles. His nose was prominent, his mouth large, as if made on purpose to talk, and his eyes of a blueish cast, and so keen that it seemed as if he could look right through a person. He has a fine forehead, indicative of no ordinary brain, and beautiful white locks, which hung about his brow and shoulders, and added to his venerable appearance. There was as much native dignity about him as any man I ever saw. He seemed born to

sway others. There was an ansterity about his looks that was forbidding to those who were unacquainted with him.

In dress he was a pattern of neatness and plainness. He could have passed for a Quaker had it not been for the color of his garments, which were black when I traveled with him. He formerly wore gray clothes. He wore a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, a frock coat, which was generally buttoned up to the neck, with straight collar. He wore breeches or small clothes, with leggings. Some times he wore shoe-buckles. Indeed all the preachers, and I among the number, wore breeches and leggings till 1810, and then several left them off, which Bishop Asbury heartily disapproved.

As an administrator Asbury often seems not to have followed the rules generally prescribed for those who would succeed in this area of leadership. Nevertheless it must be admitted that few leaders of the Christian community in any age have succeeded in effective administration as well as he. When put in command of the scattered societies of Methodism in colonial America, he knew full well that he needed more than that word of authority which had been given to him by Wesley. He believed that in order to lead such a people he needed to be thoroughly identified with them. This identity was to be achieved by understanding and participation. Asbury was constantly in pursuit of these objectives. He quickly grasped the meaning of the life in which these American pioneers had been called and when he understood that and them, he cheerfully gave himself to share fully in their joys and sorrows, or their tears and triumphs. He followed them from Georgia to Maine along the eastern seaboard, and with them penetrated the forest and prairie of the territory beyond the eastern mountains. Such identification put him in a place of high esteem and appreciation. His great love for all men in all conditions of life won for him a kind of loyalty which brought him to a place of leadership among them. Thus an important condition among the people was established which made it possible for Asbury to exercise his native gifts of administration.

Boehm says that he was wise and far-seeing, and kept his work mapped out beforehand. The mass of appointments which he was required to make at every conference was prepared well in advance, and it was seldom that any change needed to be made.

Duren⁶ says in his work on Asbury, "He had an intuitive understanding of men and a common sense grasp of situations which defy analysis." Boehm⁷ affirms:

⁶ William L. Duren, FRANCIS ASBURY, (New York, 1928), p. 89.

⁷ Boehm, p. 440.

⁵ Henry Boehm, REMINISCENCES, p. 438.

the bishop not only read men for the sake of the church, but for their own sakes. He would say to me, 'Henry, Brother A or B has been too long in the rice plantation, or on the Peninsula; he looks pale, health begins to decline; he must go up to the high lands.' The preacher would be removed and know not the cause, and the next year come to conference with health improved and constitution invigorated, and not know to whom he was indebted for the change; for the bishop assigned few reasons, and made but few explanations for his conduct.

As a preacher Boehm classified him as superior. The basis of this belief rests upon Asbury's versatility and effectiveness. He was able to adjust himself and his message to a variety of circumstances. He was likewise able to understand the condition and the need of those who heard him, and by immediate divine aid he succeeded in communicating the Word of God to them. Boehm was privileged to hear him preach more than fifteen hundred times and characterizes his preaching thus.⁸

His sermons were scripturally rich. He was a well-instructed scribe, "bringing out of his treasury things new and old." He was a good expounder of the Word of God, giving the meaning of the writer, the mind of the Spirit. He was wise in his selection of texts. There was a rich variety in his sermons. No tedious sameness; no repeating old stale truths. He could be a son of thunder or consolation. There was a variety both in matter and manner. He was great at camp-meetings, on funeral occasions, and at ordinations. I have heard him preach fifty ordination sermons, and they were among the most impressive I have ever heard.

In preaching he depended, like the fathers, much on the divine influence. He knew it was 'not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.' He once took hold of the arm of Rev. Samuel Thomas, when he rose in the pulpit to preach whispered to him, 'Feel for the power, feel for the power, brother! He often felt for the power himself, and when he obtained it he was a kind of moral Samson. When he did not he was like Samson shorn of his strength . . . I am a witness to the struggles, the sighs, the tears, the prayers of Bishop Asbury for divine influence, that he might wield with success the sword of the Spirit.'

Boehm often presents the subject, text, and outline of a sermon which he heard the bishop preach. He usually includes in greater detail the development of the sermon that one is apt to find in other narratives. A typical illustration of such is found in the following outline.

Subject: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

⁸ Boehm, p. 440.

Text: "But now being made from sin, ye become servants to God, and have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."
Romans 6:22

Thus there are four characteristics of the Christian as seen from the text.

- I. Dignity—"Servant of God"
- II. Freedom—"Being made free from sin."
- III. Fruit—"Your fruit unto holiness"
- IV. The End—"Everlasting life."

Asbury was a careful and diligent student of the Bible. He gave himself to its reading during regular and extended periods of time. Boehm says, "He was one of the best readers of the Scriptures I ever heard. There was solemnity and dignity in his manner, and correctness in his emphasis and accents." He likewise sees him to be a great scholar even though he was a self-taught man. He learned the Hebrew language and carried the Hebrew Bible as his constant companion.

He also read many books because he carefully disciplined his time. He knew its value, brevity, and its relation to eternity and thus he kept the rule of the Discipline, "Be diligent; never be triflingly employed."

As Wesley before him, he gave much attention to a practical study of medicine. This he considered as a necessity for his own well being and that of those to whom he preached. He often found much sickness in sparsely settled areas where medical aid was far removed. Among such he often ministered with natural remedies, and succeeded in relieving pain and healing diseases.

There is a sense in which this pioneer bishop brought the ministry of the church wherever he went. Whether cabin home or colonial mansion Asbury saw its residents in need of the love and grace of God. He made himself the dispenser of such divine gifts. Many young couples were by him united in holy wedlock. Countless children and infants received from his hands the sacrament of Christian baptism. While traveling westward in 1811 near Xenia, Ohio, he was graciously entertained by a family whose name was Simpson. Little was it then known that the infant son of this home upon whose head the bishop's hands were laid in baptism, and to whom the name Matthew was given, would one day become one of Methodism's great bishops.

The bishop was always fond of children, and they responded to his love

for them. They loved to be near him and listen attentively to the fascinating stories which this great man seemed always to have in abundance. As the children were gathered to hear he would say:

Learn to read, and learn to pray;

Learn to work, and learn to obey.

Then would follow the simple explanation of these words for the comprehension of young minds.

"Learn to read, to make you wise; learn to pray to make you good; learn to work, to get your living; learn to obey, that you may be obeyed."

Boehm says of such experiences,

One day we were approaching a house, and a little boy saw us coming. He ran in and said, 'Mother I want my face washed and a clean apron on, for Bishop Asbury is coming, and I am sure he will hug me up.' The bishop loved to hug the children to his heart, which always beat with such pure affection toward them. In this respect he strikingly resembled his Master, and was a fine model for ministers to follow.

Throughout the years of Asbury's public ministry one observes many evidences of his genuine compassion and self-giving for people in all conditions of life. The preachers under his care were always a great concern to him. He constantly sought funds to be used in their behalf, especially in situations where even the meager annual salary of sixty-four dollars would be paid only in part. The widow and the orphan were the objects of his genuine and practical concern. His own mother though far removed from his intimate attention, was daily in his thought and prayer. At one time he considered the possibility of bringing her to America, but such a plan was concluded to be unwise as well as perhaps impossible. He did contribute substantially to her support out of his own meager salary (sixty-four dollars per year) as long his mother lived.

Asbury in his journal lists a number of reasons why he chose not to marry, the principal one being that he believed the work which God had called him to do in the frontier of America could not have been accomplished if he had allowed himself the pleasure of establishing a home and family. He did, however, maintain the belief that every man should support one woman. And this belief he put into practice by caring for his mother while she lived, and later charged himself to maintain the widow of his preacher colleague, John Dickens. This he continued as long as he lived, and

in his will made provision that Mrs. Dickens be paid eighty dollars until the time of her death.

Boehm relates the following account of an incident which illustrates the universal concern which Asbury manifested toward the poor wherever he found them.⁹

Passing through Ohio we came to a place where the cow of a widow woman was about to be sold for debt. The bishop's heart was touched, and he was determined the widow's cow should not be sold. He said, "It must not be," and giving something himself, he solicited money from others who were present, till in a few minutes sufficient was raised to satisfy the claim against her. The widow expressed her gratitude not only with words but tears as she started to drive her cow home. I have named this to show what kind of a heart beat in his bosom; that, like his Master, he went about doing good.

The final word of gratitude in behalf of his beloved colleague in the ministry and companion in travel is given by Boehm¹⁰ in the concluding paragraph of his evaluation. He says,

For five years I not only traveled with the venerable Asbury, but slept with him. I traveled forty thousand miles with Bishop Asbury, and since I entered the itinerancy I have traveled on horseback over one hundred thousand miles, more than four times the circumference of the earth. When the bishop was ill I would wrap myself in my blanket and lie down on the floor beside the bed and watch till I heard him call 'Henry,' and then I would rise and minister to his wants. Being so feeble he needed a great deal of attention. Many times I have taken him from his horse and carried him in my arms into private houses and meeting-houses, where he would sit down and expound the word of life to the astonishment of all who heard him . . . He often preached sitting down, not so much in imitation of his Lord, but because he was unable to stand up.

He possessed more deadness to the world, more of a self-sacrificing spirit, more of the spirit of prayer, (He was literally a man of prayer. He prayed much in secret, and this accounts for his power in prayer in public. He was in the habit of presenting each conference and the preachers by name before the Lord). of Christian enterprise, of labor, and of benevolence, than any other man I ever knew. He was the most unselfish being I was ever acquainted with. Bishop Whatcoat I loved, Bishop McKendree I admired, Bishop Asbury I venerated.

⁹ Boehm, p. 454.

¹⁰ Boehm, p. 459.

FRANCIS ASBURY — "GREATNESS PASSING BY"

by

HENRY LYLE LAMBDIN

Some Anniversary Reflections

Sunday, October 27, 1771 a blue-eyed, twenty-six year old Methodist missionary from Staffordshire, England, landed at Philadelphia after a fifty day voyage from the Port of Pill, near Bristol. He was glad that the long voyage was over. Sea-sick for the first three days, "no sickness equal to it," Francis Asbury began a Journal as soon as he was able to put pen to paper. Many others were keeping diaries, Joseph Pilmoor among them. In France, Rousseau had returned to Paris and was finishing his famed "Confessions." Benjamin Franklin was in England, and while serving as agent for Georgia and Massachusetts, was beginning his Autobiography.

Discontent was everywhere, in France, in England, and especially in America. Edmund Burke was observing the popular reaction to his pamphlet, "Thoughts On the Cause of Our Present Discontents," published in 1770. He was to have further thoughts soon on how to bring about conciliation with the American Colonists, for in 1773, both proper and improper Bostonians would stage a dramatic Tea Party. There was much talk by Americans about changing government by political and military revolution, but little was heard about changing citizens by a deeper revolution at the center of their being. A realist would have adjudged the first revolution as inevitable, and the latter as difficult if not impossible. The latter, "the work of God," was the cause to which Francis Asbury would devote his life.

He was traveling light, more from ignorance than intention. But things had happened in a hurry. At Conference in the New Room at Bristol, he had heard John Wesley read letters from America pleading that more and abler Methodist preachers be sent. Circuit No. 50—America, had reported 316 members in 1770, but the work was growing. Asbury heard, was stirred to volunteer, and was accepted by Wesley. It was August 7, and no time to be lost: home to Staffordshire, a long farewell to parents and friends on the circuits, and then back to Bristol "without one penny of money." But the New Room was filled with well-wishers who provided Asbury with clothes, two blankets, ten pounds in money, but no bed. Richard Wright, a fellow preacher, furnished passage money. The Journal records: "I found by experience, that the Lord will provide for those who trust in Him." The cynic might say that the Lord's provision was scanty. Those who discern deeply would conclude that here was one of those men who can undertake to do something "without aspirin, overshoes and a life insurance policy," to borrow

Lewis Mumford's phrase. His luggage was not worth a second glance, except for an armful of books, about which more later. Much had happened in eleven weeks.

Joseph Pilmoor had arranged lodgings at the home of Mr. Francis Harris, and did all that he could to make young Asbury feel at home in Philadelphia, but ten days later he took the stage for New York. In Burlington by nightfall, but not too tired to preach in the courthouse that evening, he saw "one P. Van Pelt" who had heard him preach in Philadelphia. This first lay friendship was to be long lasting and far reaching. Together they crossed New Jersey from south to north, ferried over to Staten Island and stopped at Woodrow, where Van Pelt and Mr. Justice Wright lived. After two days of preaching, that is, morning, afternoon and night, Asbury departed for New York on Tuesday, November 12. There he met Pilmoor's companion, Richard Boardman, whom he found to be "a kind, loving, worthy man, truly amiable and entertaining, and of a childlike temper." The characteristics omitted are significant: firm, aggressive, venturesome. After ten days in Philadelphia and seven in New York, Asbury had the situation sized up and wrote down his diagnosis and prescriptions. He saw no reason for Boardman and himself being "in town together;" no reason why the preachers should settle down in the cities during winter; no reason for "a lack of circulation of preachers" save partiality and popularity; above all, no reason for his delaying action because of the possibility of opposition and trouble. The humble, resolute, but revealing assertion of purpose followed: "I think that I shall show them the way," and show them the way he did by taking off into wintry Westchester. A similar preaching excursion later came near to costing him his life, but even this did not suffice to stop him. Farther and farther he went, determined to show Methodist preachers the way.

LEADERSHIP THAT EVOKED FOLLOWERSHIP

Bishop Francis J. McConnell says that while Asbury "insisted upon keeping supervisory power almost wholly within his own hands, he won and kept the regard of Methodist ministers and laymen to a greater degree than any other leader in the history of the Church." What was the secret of his leadership? Certainly not glamour or that power of appeal called "charisma" by modern journalists. Rather it was something that shone out amid the bafflement of confusion. The great leader is distinguished by his ability to discern amid the whole array of optional ideas the essential idea; amid the numerous possible courses of action the one course that will be increasingly vindicated the farther it is pursued. Asbury did not retain the regard of his fellow Methodists by being "all things to all men" in the sense of falling in with what they liked; rather he held their loyalty by being deeply and genu-

inely what they, after the siftings of sustained reflection, decided they were looking for, namely, a man who combined in himself the wisdom and patience of faith, a man who after he saw through things resolutely saw things through. He was faith-filled if we construe faith as including (1) a keen consciousness of God, (2) a childlike confidence in God's ways and workings, and (3) a commitment to God of self, substance, and skill, or loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength. When confusion was prevalent, Asbury's unglamorous words and workmanship shone as unmistakable as the oriflamme of St. Denis on the field of battle.

Even a few selections of major affirmations will help to unveil the kind of man he was. "Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? Gain honor? To get money? No; I AM GOING TO LIVE TO GOD AND BRING OTHERS SO TO DO. In America there has been a WORK OF GOD. I comfort myself that my intention is upright and that I have THE CAUSE OF GOD AT HEART. I am fixed to the Methodist plan, A CIRCULATION OF PREACHERS. I think that I SHALL SHOW THEM THE WAY. The Lord favors me with great discoveries of my defects and unfaithfulness. The Lord shows me the excellency of affliction and enables me to exercise resignation to all conditions of life. It would be an ETERNAL DISHONOR TO THE METHODISTS THAT WE SHOULD LEAVE 3,000 SOULS WHO DESIRE TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO OUR CARE. I AM DETERMINED NOT TO LEAVE THEM, LET THE CONSEQUENCE BE WHAT IT MAY. I leave myself in the hand of God. Three thousand miles from home, my friends have left me. I am considered by some as an enemy of the country. It appears to be the will of God that I should be silent for a season, to prepare me for further usefulness hereafter. IT IS PLAIN TO ME THAT THE DEVIL WILL LET US READ ALWAYS IF WE WILL NOT PRAY. Many things are painful to me, especially slavekeeping and its attendant evils. O my God, let not disaster come upon America. We were in great haste (at the Christmas Conference) and did much business in little time. I am sometimes afraid of being led to think something more of myself in my new station than formerly. I FEEL THE WORTH OF SOULS, AND THE WEIGHT OF THE PASTORAL CHARGE, AND THAT THE CONSCIENTIOUS DISCHARGE OF ITS IMPORTANT DUTIES REQUIRES SOMETHING MORE THAN HUMAN LEARNING, UNWIELDY SALARIES, OR CLERICAL TITLES OF D.D., OR EVEN BISHOPS. THE EYES OF ALL, BOTH PREACHERS AND PEOPLE WILL BE OPENED IN TIME." Even these few selections from the Journal show us that Asbury had seen through himself, knew who he was, had met and solved the identity crisis, and was convinced that God could sanctify to him every distress. Preachers and people felt that such a man could be trusted over the long run. The road and the run proved to be long. While Asbury asked much of others, he always asked more of himself. Such leadership evokes followership.

BOOKS AND THE MAN

The twenty-six year old missionary to America had little luggage save his armful of books. Formal schooling had ended at twelve because he refused to endure further beatings "by a great churl of a schoolmaster," one apparently more sadistic than the teacher under whom George Orwell suffered. The Staffordshire father, a farmer, apprenticed him to learn how to make "buckle chapes." Asbury's mother had lost an only daughter, Sarah, and would stand at the window looking out while she lived "in a very dark, dark, dark day and place." At length, God was "pleased to open the eyes of her mind," and her house became a meeting place for a Methodist class. Bready remarks that "His mother's class became Asbury's theological school." If so, he certainly pursued a goodly number of extracurricular courses. Learning was to be had for the listening. Good diction and evangelical divinity by listening to "Ryland, Stillingfleet, Talbot, Bagnall, Mansfield, Hawes and Venn, great names and esteemed gospel ministers," and by reading "Whitefield and Cennick's sermons and every good book I could meet with." Would that we had the names of the books that Asbury read from the time that he left school, aged twelve, to the time of his embarking for America, aged twenty-six! Somewhere during the intervening fourteen years, he acquired a working knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Asbury's Hebrew Bible is a cherished volume in the Rose Memorial Library at Drew.

Asbury lists the books that he read during the fifty day voyage. They look to be reasoned, not random, selections. The Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Appeals and Sermons by John Wesley, "The Work of God in New England" by Johnathan Edwards, are understandable choices. But why the works of Norris? Why DeRenty's Life? John Norris was an intellectual, an able philosopher, an Oxford Fellow of All Souls who was a disciple of the Cambridge Platonists, an able expositor of Malebranche, an opposer of John Locke and the sensualists and author of an answer to Toland's "Christianity Not Mystical." DeRenty was a devout French Nobleman whose biography, written by Jean Baptiste Saint-Jure, had been translated into English in 1658. John Wesley had first published an extract from it and then later included it in "A Christian Library." It seems clear that "every good book" included among others the reading lists that Wesley suggested for his helpers and traveling preachers. DeRenty's Life appears in the list of 1746. Wesley liked the Platonism of Norris because it gave philosophical and practical support to his views of the nature of faith and the personal character of true religion, and recommended both the works of Norris and Malebranche to his preachers. Fourteen years of listening to noted preachers and reading recommended books had produced a man who recorded his resolve "to read 100 pages of good literature a day." From saddlebags or the packhorse's load came spiritual classics, Doddridge, Baxter, William Law, Thomas a

Kempis; also biographies, Origen, Calvin, Halyburton, Welsh, DeRenty, and David Brainerd—"a man of my own make." John Marshall's *Life of Washington* he compared to the two-volume work by Belknap, the latter being "perhaps better." Asbury was fond of history. Josephus' twelve volumes of *Universal History*, Rollins' *Ancient History*, Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, Sewall's *History of the Quakers*, Roberson's *Scotland*, Gordon's *American Revolution*, Jefferson's *French Revolution*, and Jesse Lee's *Methodism*, all were read and commented upon. At Bath, in 1788, while "obliged to keep close house" because of "great rains," he "reads, writes and prays;" the entry in the *Journal* notes that "We have a little of almost everything to improve the mind—the languages, divinity, grammar, history, and belles-lettres; my great desire is to improve in the best things." At Chuckey, near Greenville, Tennessee he read Lord Chesterfield's "The Principles of Politeness." Beyond the Savannah swamps, "I lodged with Mr. Henry, a Jew, We read Hebrew part of the night, and I should have been pleased to have spent the night thus occupied with so good a scholar." The Bible was not neglected: "This morning I ended reading my Bible through in four months. It is hard work for me to find time for this, but all I read I owe to early rising." If "continuing theological education" meant this sort of thing, it would deserve more than encouragement; it would deserve to be subsidized. When John Dickins, the first publishing agent, was editing *The Arminian Magazine*, Asbury urged, "Let us have more American lives and letters." This was 140 years before Mencken emphasized the same appeal in *The American Mercury*.

INTO HISTORY BY HORSEBACK

"The omnipresence of Asbury is a giant fact of American church history," writes L. C. Rudolph in his 1968 study of the Bishop. That first trip into wintry Westchester on November 22, 1771 "to show them the way," was the beginning of year-round itinerating that would end forty-five years later and 260,000 traversed miles behind him as he breathed his last at the home of his friend, George Arnold, twenty miles from Fredericksburg, Virginia on Sunday, March 31, 1816. The coming of the War for Independence boded ill for English Methodist leadership in America. The Embury-Heck families headed north to Ashgrove. Captain Webb remained in England, Rankin and Rodda returned to the mother country. Finally, George Shadford, beloved and importuned by Asbury to remain in America, also departed. Loneliness became an ordeal as it was intensified by enforced seclusion in Delaware, and as Methodists such as "Brother J. Hartley" and Freeborn Garretson were arrested. New York and Philadelphia were closed by the British Army. As soon as Asbury's sympathies with the Colonists cause became known, he began to travel again and preached throughout the Peninsula, then farther and farther southward. By 1780 his circuit extended

from Baltimore to the Haw River in North Carolina, then via Hillsboro and Petersburg into the Blue Ridge Mountains, then back to Fredericksburg and to Baltimore. After the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the Christmas Conference in 1784, the circuit kept expanding until it reached from Philadelphia to Cincinnati and Nashville, then by way of the Holston and French Broad valley to Buncombe or Ashville, and on to Augusta and Milledgeville in Georgia. Returning northward through the Carolinas, Virginia and Maryland to Philadelphia, Asbury would take a fresh start and travel from New York through New Haven, Providence, Boston to Monmouth, Maine. Once he crossed into Canada. After crossing New York State to the headwaters of the Susquehanna, he would come down the Susquehanna Valley to Wilkes Barre, and then head for Martin Boehm's home near Lancaster. One journey of this kind would be more than enough for most people in a lifetime and furnish enough material for a large book. Francis Asbury covered such circuits year after year for thirty-one years, despite recurrent quinsy or abscessed throat, inflammation of the legs, toothache at times, and what was known as "debility." More remarkable, he did so despite some astounding remedies. Tobacco was the remedy for toothache. On January 15, 1780 he tried it and "found some relief." Quinine or "the bark" was taken for "debility." One concoction called the drink diet" was made of a quart of hard cider, 100 nails, a handful of black snakeroot, another of pennell seed, and a third of wormwood. Milk or butter was not to be eaten during the ten day diet. On December 13, 1797, Asbury took not only a wine glass of the concoction in the morning, but also "fever powders," to cure debility. Frequently the only accommodations to be found on wilderness roads were one-room cabins, occupied by large families, dogs not excluded, fleas often included, That anyone would voluntarily accept such hardships caused the well off and comfortable to wonder. In 1811, Dr. Benjamin Rush and the famous surgeon, Dr. Philip Physick, paid the Bishop a visit while he was in Germantown and prescribed for him. When asked what was their fee, their answer was, "Nothing; only an interest in your prayers." Said the Bishop, "As I do not like to be in debt we will pray now," which he then did. By the time of his death, Asbury had been seen by more people in America than any other man.

"Barbarism," as Horace Bushnell was to point out in 1847, "is the first great danger of a society in motion." When Asbury arrived in 1771, America was in motion, slow motion it seemed to a nation on horseback, but rapid enough to swiftly expand the frontier. Against the tendency to revert to barbarism, Asbury and his appointees preached repentance and the necessity of a new birth. Their message was direct and personal. They demonstrated what is always true of such preaching, that as religion is personalized it is emotionalized, and releases a new contagion. In 1810, Thomas Cleland, a Presbyterian minister in Kentucky, found many settlements where

there was no preaching except by Methodists. To a friend in Philadelphia he wrote, "The Methodists make preachers so much faster than we do, that they always get the start in these vacancies." Cleland's analysis could have gone farther and deeper. Instead of resting in the dictum, "Doctrine precedes and produces experience,"—which it clearly does, sometimes—he could have observed, as A. V. Murray points out, "that the description of our own experience we might properly call DOCTRINE, for that is what it is . . . The householder brings out of his treasure things new and old. Thus DOCTRINE is created by experience, that is, created by life."

The most impressive thing about Asbury and his coworkers was not the hardships they endured or the barbarisms they encountered, but their awareness of God and of the work of God. Rabbi Heschel in *MAN'S QUEST FOR GOD* observes that "Mindfulness of God rises slowly, a thought at a time," and that "the test of a true sermon is that it can be converted into a prayer. In prayer two things come to pass, a person and a word. A word detached from a person is numb; a person detached from a word is illiterate. The very essence of prayer is the blending of the two." Finely said, and true as far as it goes, but does it go far enough? The essence of the Christian experience is that God is seeking us; that we have been found by a seeking Father; that being found is such a surprising, unexpected and inexplicable event, that is, so purely by God's grace, this grace must be for all men. Grace so vast and personal must be universal.

"Throughout the world its breadth is known,
Wide as infinity,
So wide, it never passed by one
Or it had passed by me."

To such an experience Asbury and the frontier preachers held true, and bore witness. It has implicit in it numerous corollary doctrines, particularly a doctrine of the church as being not primarily "the extension of the Incarnation," but "the extension of the Apostolic Witness." The Word is not only Ecclesia-producing; it is "Preacher-producing," as Cleland observed but did not understand.

A REVEALING LETTER

After Asbury arrived in New York on November 12, 1771, he wrote down his purposes: first, to achieve a circulation of preachers; second, an itinerancy that would be active the year round; third, a demonstration that winter travel was possible and that he would "show them the way." This last he achieved by winter excursions into Westchester, although one of these came near to costing him his life. Still, his act once performed stood

"as an iron pillar strong, and steadfast as a wall of brass." What underlay this grand design was not fully stated until he wrote a letter to Jesse Lee in 1798. Lee had heard of the spiritual dearth of New England while he was attending a Conference in Old St. David's Episcopal Church in Cheraw, South Carolina. The story of his labors before finding any response in the city of Lynn is a Methodist classic. When the Bishop was traveling with Lee in New England in 1798, Lee wished to remain there rather than return to the South, as Asbury importuned him to do. In his letter to Lee, Asbury advances this argument: "You and every man who thinks properly will find that it will never do to divide the North from the South. Methodism is union all over, union in exchange of preachers, union in exchange of sentiments, union in exchange of interest. **WE MUST DRAW RESOURCES FROM THE CENTER TO THE CIRCUMFERENCE.**" Why this emphasis on North and South? The Constitution of the United States, framed in 1787, had just been put into effect in 1789. Bishop Asbury realized the difficulties in keeping the new nation unified, as well as any statesman of that time or later. To him, the cement of a good society was spiritual. To divide America on regional or sectional grounds was to invite disaster. To divide Methodism on similar grounds meant exalting the secular above the spiritual, the partial above the inclusive, the disintegrative above the unifying. Hence the emphasis on "Methodism is all union," that is, unitive and unifying. It is so by its "circulation of preachers;" by its cross-leavening of convictions borne by preachers and laymen from North to South and vice versa; by its interchange of ideas and concern from Conference to Conference and from state to state. Leaders, such as Jesse Lee, were to be transmitters of the unitive and unifying spiritual resources of Methodism from the center to the circumference. If Methodists could not maintain union was it likely that the nation could? The division of the Methodists in 1844 was followed by the division of the nation in 1861. Francis Asbury had been dead only 28 years when his worst fears for the Methodists came to pass.

WHAT DID THESE METHODISTS BELIEVE?

Defining, always difficult, becomes almost baffling when one tries to pin down Wesley and Asbury to flat, propositional statements. Dr. H. F. Rall often asserted, "Methodism began not with a theological system but with a quest for salvation." But this quest, in John Wesley's case, arose amidst a complex of existent things: among them the Established Church of England which was itself the product of controversies and compromises of the 17th century, a vigorous Non-conformity on one side of the family, the Evangelical movement, and acquaintance with the idea advanced by "The Country Parson's Advice to His Parishioners" which led to the formation of the Holy Club and later to an exploration of the Religious Societies, all of these elements becoming fused together by a serious study of the

Scriptures as the sufficient rule for faith and practice. A quest is an experience in itself, but an experience that is understandable only by the flashback of culmination. As Sir Henry Jones would put it: "The lowest is the way to the highest, but the highest is the key to the lowest." Do all the analyzing and deducing that we may, it seems necessary to conclude that Methodism is a kind of historic emergent where the whole is something more than the sum of all its parts. So far as a single formal statement of what these Methodists believed is concerned, that which was the basis of the Uniting Conference of the Wesleyan, United and Primitive Methodist Church in 1932 is as satisfactory as any: "The Methodist Church lays particular stress upon certain privileges and duties which belong to the company of all faithful people. (1) The primary vocation and responsibility of declaring the universality of the grace of God by preaching the gospel of a free, full, present salvation for everyone who repents and believes upon the Lord Jesus Christ. (2) A change of heart wrought by the grace of God, issuing a new birth, in a conscious personal experience of the forgiveness of sins and of divine sonship, assured by the witness of the Holy Spirit, and in the spiritual glow of a joy unspeakable and full of glory, as the present privilege of every believer in Christ. (3) The necessity of a living fellowship in the realities of Christian experience, in order to nourish the life of God in the soul and to enrich the Body of Christ. (4) The possibility, here and now, of Christians being made perfect in love through the obedience of faith. (5) The universal priesthood of believers."

Observe the heavy emphasis on experience. Nels Ferre remarked that "while the affirmation that God can be experienced is central to all Christianity, for Methodism it is of exceptional historic import." George Croft Cell maintains that for the first time in Christian thought, Methodism's appeal to experience is so pervasive and powerful as to determine its historic individuality, and to actually give us a theology of experience. Students of Edwin Lewis will recall his insistence that "Truth is not fully true until it is true for me," a statement that looks to be undeniable to one who believes in God's offer of "a free, full, present salvation to everyone who repents and believes upon the Lord Jesus Christ." Does this say something to those who are caught in the current confusion of Christian thought?

Walter D. Wagoner describes that confusion as he sees it: "Existentialism on all sides, Tillichian ontology above, Bultmanian hermeneutics below, the surgical analyses of the church from all quarters, the eschatology of Schweitzer, the dogmatics of Barth, the unnerving demands of Bonhoeffer and Kirkegaard, the radical scepticism of linguistic analysis, the uneasy confusions deriving from all the slippery talk about 'myth, symbol and historicity,' the challenge of ecumenicity to familiar and comfortable postures, —all within an ethos of international chaos without and Freudian complexity

within." If the experts are confused, is it any wonder that the everyday Christian finds himself mixed up?

But there have been some knowledgeable warnings. William E. Hocking once remarked that "Subtle religion is false religion." Subtle theology may be wise theology but subtlety of the philosophic mind is away from the entirety of experience to some selected segment or area where reason can exercise its proprietary rights. Cardinal Newman realized that "God has not seen fit to save His people by philosophy." (Non in dialectica complacuit Deo saluum facere populum suum). It is not at all certain that the current fashion of starting seminary entrants off with a course in Philosophy of Religion is the wisest initiation into understanding vital religion. Hegel's remark that "The owl of Minerva does not begin its flights until the twilight has come," would seem to suggest that unless there is first a vital religious experience, there is not much to philosophize about. There are simplifying catastrophes; there are simplifying deliverances. Life brings the first. The Gospel offers the second, a "free, full, present salvation."

The second emphasis is on the necessity of a living fellowship in the realities of Christian experience to nourish the life of God in the soul. Living together is a primary and persistent human problem. The time-honored way of solving it is by the maxim, "We descend to unite." This works, after a fashion, in business, pleasure and politics. It is the essence of pragmatic secularism. Bishop McConnell once defined secularism as "what our fathers meant by the world, the flesh and the devil." But "descending to unite" was not the distinguishing characteristic of the new emergent at Pentecost, the Ecclesia, Church, Believers incorporate, fellowship of Saints, Brethren, Faith-filled men, New People of God—call it what you will. For once there appeared something that overcame and reversed the world's working principle and impelled men to "ascend to unite." The Disciples, looking upward, began to "seek the things that are above where Christ is," and found that the ascent was unlimited and that the further they pressed, the closer they came together. Wesley, urging the importance of not only making profession of faith but also of joining together in a society, said: "There is something not easily explained in the fellowship of the Spirit which we enjoy with a society of living Christians." Explicable or not, growth of the life of God in the soul was the consequence. It was this sort of "living fellowship" that Asbury and the circuit riders carried to the frontier. Wesley claimed for it New Testament support and asserted that it is what the Christian Church is—or should be. It is a revolutionary conception, "one of the most radical doctrines of the Church ever set forth," according to Professor F. A. Norwood of Garrett, "the people of God called Methodists," distinguished by their aim to be "a select group in which all would be ministers, each to the other, a fellowship of confessors, a company of ministers."

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within." If the experts are confused, is it any wonder that the everyday Christian finds himself mixed up?

But there have been some knowledgeable warnings. William E. Hocking once remarked that "Subtle religion is false religion." Subtle theology may be wise theology but subtlety of the philosophic mind is away from the entirety of experience to some selected segment or area where reason can exercise its proprietary rights. Cardinal Newman realized that "God has not seen fit to save His people by philosophy." (Non in dialectica complacuit Deo saluum facere populum suum). It is not at all certain that the current fashion of starting seminary entrants off with a course in Philosophy of Religion is the wisest initiation into understanding vital religion. Hegel's remark that "The owl of Minerva does not begin its flights until the twilight has come," would seem to suggest that unless there is first a vital religious experience, there is not much to philosophize about. There are simplifying catastrophes; there are simplifying deliverances. Life brings the first. The Gospel offers the second, a "free, full, present salvation."

The second emphasis is on the necessity of a living fellowship in the realities of Christian experience to nourish the life of God in the soul. Living together is a primary and persistent human problem. The time-honored way of solving it is by the maxim, "We descend to unite." This works, after a fashion, in business, pleasure and politics. It is the essence of pragmatic secularism. Bishop McConnell once defined secularism as "what our fathers meant by the world, the flesh and the devil." But "descending to unite" was not the distinguishing characteristic of the new emergent at Pentecost, the Ecclesia, Church, Believers incorporate, fellowship of Saints, Brethren, Faith-filled men, New People of God—call it what you will. For once there appeared something that overcame and reversed the world's working principle and impelled men to "ascend to unite." The Disciples, looking upward, began to "seek the things that are above where Christ is," and found that the ascent was unlimited and that the further they pressed, the closer they came together. Wesley, urging the importance of not only making profession of faith but also of joining together in a society, said: "There is something not easily explained in the fellowship of the Spirit which we enjoy with a society of living Christians." Explicable or not, growth of the life of God in the soul was the consequence. It was this sort of "living fellowship" that Asbury and the circuit riders carried to the frontier. Wesley claimed for it New Testament support and asserted that it is what the Christian Church is—or should be. It is a revolutionary conception, "one of the most radical doctrines of the Church ever set forth," according to Professor F. A. Norwood of Garrett, "the people of God called Methodists," distinguished by their aim to be "a select group in which all would be ministers, each to the other, a fellowship of confessors, a company of ministers."

But such a Church is not narrow in its outlook. Because God's grace is universal, His Church Universal includes all whom He shall call unto Himself, everyone who works righteousness and is approved of Him. The ecclesiola in ecclesia, the cell-church in the great body of the Church, is there to transmit its vital resources from the center to the circumference. The ecclesiola in ecclesia provides for developing Christian experience in depth; the ecclesia provides the ecclesiola with the breadth of brotherhood with all whom God calls unto Himself.

DISCIPLINE FOUNDED ON COMMON SENSE

The statement which was the basis of the British Uniting Conference shied away from the word "Discipline." Instead it spoke of "the NECESSITY of a living fellowship in the realities of Christian experience." Give it as softly as we may, "necessity" remains an iron word. If "a living fellowship" is a necessity for nourishing the life of God in every Christian soul, how shall the fellowship be generated, guided and governed save by discipline? Wesley affirmed that discipline was one of the SPIRITUAL HELPS that God bestows and "that in this respect the Methodists are a highly favored people." Further, "the Methodist discipline is founded entirely on common sense." He urged leaders of Classes or Bands, "Preach our doctrine, inculcate experience, urge practice, enforce discipline." All four were needed because doctrine alone could produce antinomians, experience alone could produce enthusiasts, practice alone could produce pharisees; even the preaching of all three without a demanding discipline "would be like a highly cultivated garden without a fence, exposed to the ravages of the wild boar of the forest." Discipline was spelled out in detail: faithful attendance at regular services of worship and at class meeting; the study of Scripture and good literature; participation in the singing of hymns; sharing in house-to-house visitation and in teaching the young; contributing to the spread of the gospel; aiding the needy, the widow, the orphan and the prisoner, especially the imprisoned debtor; obeying the rules that pertain to upright living and worthy citizenship; doing good to all men; and all the while seeking to become a mature, entire, complete Christian, that is, a Christian who through the obedience of faith is made perfect in love. Such discipline was, according to Wesley, "simple, rational" and "founded on common sense," and "written by the Spirit on every awakened heart." In 1798, Bishops Coke and Asbury added to the Methodist Episcopal Discipline of 1796 some "Notes" on "The General Rules of the United Societies," "which the circumstances of these states required." Some of their observations are striking: "a spiritual body of (class) leaders may counteract the otherwise pernicious consequences of a languid ministry. "Sensuality, particularly intemperance, "turns the human nature, capable of the image of God, into a loathsome beast." "Buying and selling the souls

and bodies of men is a complicated crime . . . a practice contrary to every moral idea which can influence the human mind." "The merchandise of Babylon" was "gold, silver,—and slaves, and souls of men." It is scarcely possible to use many words in buying and selling without being frequently guilty of lying." "It is as great a crime to rob our country as to rob a private individual; and the blindness of too many to this truth injures not, in the least, the veracity of it." "It is natural for the men of the world to imagine that all mankind are influenced by private motives, because they know nothing of the love of God, and esteem the professors of grace as enthusiasts." American society in 1796 was rural and non-industrial, The War of 1812 which awakened the nation to its need for industrial strength had yet to be fought. But Asbury and Coke spoke to the ethical condition of their time, and to ethical problems in the making, more adequately than we are able to speak to our time. The General Rules with the Notes of Coke and Asbury supplied a disciplinary directive to the local churches for producing relevant Christians.

If one attempts to formulate a modern or up-to-date parallel to the Rules, where should he begin The Technetronic society that puts men walking on the moon is in trouble; achievement abounds but meaning is missing; in 1970, more than 30,000 books were published, not to mention 100,000 scientific journals in 60 or more languages; the annual crop of Ph. D's numbers 73,000; faith in education as a social cure-all is weakening; knowledge may come faster but wisdom lingers longer than ever; the think-tanks are leaky; extended-man electronically aided can hear sounds from the bottom of the sea six miles below or from millions of miles away in space while turning a deaf ear to plea of the needy, lonely and despairing next door; the blessings of the "invention of the art of invention" threaten to turn into a curse; the environment is polluted—Lakes Erie, Baikal, and Constance, Rivers Rhine, Volga and Hudson, air and sky over Los Angeles, London and Tokyo. Oil slicks are found in mid-ocean; mercury poisons the fish of the sea, while pesticides taint soil and stream and foreshadow a silent spring. The inner-city deteriorates; unemployables increase; the demand for social services rises while cities drift closer to insolvency and states search frantically for new sources of revenue. The generation gap widens as permissiveness takes on the airs of a time-tested philosophy. The threat of the giant mushroom looms over all as a nine-year old addict searches the school hallway to find a twelve-year old drug pusher. Space-ship Earth is realizing that it can become overcrowded, but some social recommenders promise that all will be well if only all the passengers will get down on all fours and wallow. Others cry "Revolution is the remedy," never seeming to take into account that Latin America has had more than 600 revolutions and is still in search of a remedy.

The easy answers to the great problems are false answers, however plausible their show of wisdom. Centuries ago, Jesus the son of Sirach observed: "The very true beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline." The proverb, "Whom the Lord loves He disciplines" was explained by the author of Hebrews as meaning that "thereby God makes us partakers of His holiness." Laugh as we often do at Wesley's and Asbury's emphasis on discipline and their rules for implementing it, when we try to do something similar for our day, our laughter begins to sound like "the crackling of thorns under a pot." Everything about the present condition and future prospect for Spaceship Earth argues for discipline and that desire of discipline which is the beginning of wisdom, but where is the leadership that can inspire us to acknowledge the need of discipline, desire it as the beginning of wisdom, and form the fellowship of "good men of the Church united together to be helpful to each other in all good Christian ways," as the unknown Country Parson advised his parishioners in 1680?

ASBURY AND POLITICS

April 4, 1779, Asbury's Journal recorded: "I breakfasted with a Presbyterian minister, and endeavored to answer some objections which he started, but could not attempt a vindication of those among us who had dipped deeply into politics." At the time, Asbury was in Delaware, his movements still restricted, and some Methodist preachers suspect as he then was. On September 14, Asbury visited "Brother Hartley," who was in jail for preaching. On February 29, 1780 Asbury received word that Freeborn Garretson was in Dorchester County Jail at Cambridge, Maryland.

Why was Asbury disinclined to defend the preachers who had "dipped deeply into politics?" We do not know what he had in mind but we have reasons for inferring some things from what he had suffered as well as observed. To Asbury, the call to shepherd the American Methodists had priority over every other consideration. He had seen the departure of all the other shepherds because they put personal safety or political loyalty ahead of their call. Also, he knew only too well the difficulties that John Wesley's "Calm Address to the American Colonies" had created. In the Journal for March 19, 1776 we read, "I received an affectionate letter from Mr. Wesley, and am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America. Some inconsiderate persons have taken occasion to censure the Methodists on account of Mr. Wesley's political statements." But beyond all this, Asbury had the conviction that he was bearing a message and doing a work that was more important than politics despite the fact that ultimately it would affect politics. The message was that God offers every man a free, full and present salvation if he will repent and believe upon Jesus Christ, and that by entering into a disciplined Christian

fellowship the life of God in the soul of the believer may be nourished until he becomes an ENTIRE, MATURE Christian. Such Christians can and will participate in politics, and because of what they are and the convictions that they hold will work for the betterment of the nation. Asbury held George Washington in high regard. He appreciated what Washington was doing in 1779 for his fellow countrymen during the struggle for Independence. Later, he was impressed with Washington's honesty and humaneness regarding the suffering of the people in slavery. Still later, he heard of Washington's dignity and patience when venomous attacks were made upon him by his political enemies. He read both Belknap's and Marshall's "Life of Washington," and when news of Washington's death came, he summed up his admiration in two words, "matchless man." To Asbury, it was more important to bring the message that produces men who will adorn public office than to engage in political arguments or run for political office and thereby obscure the primacy of the message.

Charles Peguy's remark, "Everything begins in the mystical and ends in politics," would have appealed to Asbury. The preacher can accomplish most by beginning with the "beginning." When Bishop Friedrich Wunderlich addressed the World Methodist Conference in Oslo in 1961, he advised Methodist preachers in unfriendly territory, "Stay where you are. Face problems rather than avoid them. Preach Christ and His kingdom, even if you have to pay a price for it. Remember the Lord's words, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God.' It always has priority. The Church is to be the conscience of the nation, clarified and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Never let it be linked up with a certain form of government as servant. No compromise is possible with atheism and dialectical materialism. Our task is never to erect walls of hostility. Jesus Christ has broken down such walls to create a household of God in the world. We are to invite all strangers who are self-alienated from this household into this 'dwelling-place of God in the Spirit.' Never overestimate the power of an ideology at present, however strong it may be; never underestimate the power of Christ and His kingdom, which will last forever." Such sturdy wisdom, hard won through testing experiences at the very center of Europe, is worth pondering.

In Overton's "Life in the English Church," the Religious Societies are given credit for fathering "The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge" in 1699, Seven years earlier, 1692, a "Society for the Reformation of Manners" had been formed. Many members of the Religious Societies supported both organizations. However, the Society for Reformation of Manners came to be known as "the Society for giving of Information," that is, a Vigilance Committee whose members served as "informers." The prejudice that arose against the Reformation Society "extended to the Religious Societies, and injured them in public esteem." It would seem that any Christian Fellowship,

however selfless its motive in correcting the conditions of society by coercion, is likely to be regarded as imitating Caesar, and Caesar in his unloveliest role at that. It is difficult for the Christian "reformer" to stay free from the epithet "informer," a word with a sinister sound. If a Christian Fellowship must be misunderstood—and misunderstandings, like "offences" will come—it would be better to be misunderstood on the highest level, the most difficult level, that of witnessing to God's universal grace by its joy in the free, full, present salvation that He offers, by its delight in the disciplines that nourish the life of God in the soul, and by its concern for "the fellow man," than on some lower level of activity that can be construed as denying the transforming power of the Gospel, and the Word which is like a double-edged sword.

THAT NEW PERSONAGE — THE FELLOW MAN

Bready quotes the Continental political writer, Ostrogorski, as saying that Wesley and the Christian crusaders that the Evangelical-Revival raised up as the one's who "introduced a new personage into the social and political world of Aristocratic England—THE FELLOW MAN," as they made one "see the man in the criminal, the brother in the negro." Asbury found that the frontier as well as the aristocracy of the cotton and rice plantations had yet to discover "the fellow man." In 1788, on the way through Tygert's Valley to Clarksburg (now West Virginia), he and his two companions stopped "near midnight at Mr. A - - -s, who hissed his dogs at us." The women of the household were kinder, and overruled Mr. A - - -. Our supper was tea . . . I lay on the floor on a few deerskins with fleas," the chronicle continues. Next day, after preaching and administering the sacrament to 700 people, the Bishop "was well satisfied" to take his leave. He goes on to describe the people as "of the boldest cast of adventurers," who scarcely regard the decencies of civilized life. Those with wealth, "lording it over the poorer neighbors and securing to themselves all the offices of profit or honor. Savage warfare teaches them to be cruel; the preaching of Antinomianism poisons them with error in doctrine. Good Moralists they are not, and good Christians they cannot be, unless they are better taught."

Not less severe was his judgment of slaveholders in Virginia. "My mind is much pained. O, to be dependent on slaveholders is in part to be a slave, and I was freeborn . . . Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, in the highest flights of rapturous piety, still maintain and defend slavery." He said that if naval vessels are "floating hells, the rice plantations can be called standing hells." Little wonder that the Address to the General Conference in 1800 and the decided utterance against slavery stirred the Assembly of South Carolina to "reprobate" the Address in 1801. Asbury tried every

approach that he could think of to remove the blight and horror of slavery from the new nation: he commended the stand of the Quakers, led the Conference of 1780 to acknowledge that "slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man and nature," "spoke to select friends about slavekeeping, but they could not bear it," solicited the influences and support of George Washington for the doing away with the owning of slaves, wrote an encouraging letter to "Mr. Rice, a Presbyterian minister" who had delivered an address on the natural rights of man to a convention in Kentucky, and invited him to preach in "our houses on his way to Philadelphia," led Conferences to forbid preachers and local preachers to hold slaves. In 1809 he even pondered the question of "amelioration" as possibly offering more immediate practical good than an attempt at "emancipation." Always he was haunted by two fears because of the evil of slavery: first, that God would forsake the Methodists if they continued to sanction or tolerate slavery; second, that disaster would come upon America if it failed to abolish the iniquitous institution. To him, "the work of God" against the monstrous evil had to be ceaselessly ongoing. On June 27, 1780, he wrote: "The Lord will certainly hear the cries of the oppressed, naked, starving creatures. O God, think on this land. Let not disaster come upon America. Amen."

WE JUDGES MUST ALWAYS FIRST JUDGE OURSELVES

In the Chilmark Miscellany this question is raised by Van Wyck Brooks: "We wonder why the lives of the saints are so fabulous, why worthies of the dark ages are so distorted in history. But what happens in our enlightened age? Wait till you lose by death some eminent friend, and then go about in the circles he frequented and try to piece together the legend of his life. You will find that he survives in the minds of his associates as both a sentimentalist and a cynic, a crimson revolutionist and a sky-high tory, a simpleton, a snob and a bourgeois, a mind of bold ideas and a teacher's pet. . . . All revealing what? the little serpents and the little doves that every circle of friends cherishes in its bosom. Rare is the rectitude of the realistic eye." As one reviews the appraisals and characterizations of Francis Asbury by historians such as Lee, Bangs, Stevens, Hurst, McTyeire, Buckley and Faulkner, or by biographers such as Mains, DuBose, Tipple, Carroll and Rudolph, Van Wyck Brooks' answer to the question he raises gives one pause. Do our best to be honestly objective, there yet lingers with us the limitation of the dove and the serpent within, ready to coo or to strike at certain intervals. Hence, Asbury was ambitious and meek, iron-handed and gentle, unyielding and always making allowances, a mystic and an activist, an individualist and an institutionalist, an unlearned man and a critical reader of many books, a tender of too many irons in the fire and a single minded promoter of Methodism, an arbitrary administrator and an approach-

able brother beloved, an intransigent and a compromiser, a self-effacing saint and an assertive pragmatist, and so, on and on, as the dove and the serpent alternate. But all this is nothing new, at least not to those who recall St. Paul's experiences and words: "To some we are a deadly fume that kills, to others a vital fragrance that brings life" (II Cor. 2:16). In judging others, the deeper the approach, the more nearly valid the verdict. John Woolman said to himself, "It is good for thee to dwell deep that thou mayest know the spirits of men." Asbury endeavored to do that. It shows up in both his substantive and adjectival activities. But how deeply do we dwell?

He made and kept many friends. Peter Van Pelt's brother moved from Staten Island to the Chuckey River in Eastern Tennessee but was never overlooked. The scrutiny of close associates of Asbury served only to increase their appreciation of his genuineness and greatness: Freeborn Garrettson said, "He prayed more and better than any man I ever knew;" Henry Boehm said, "He was the most unselfish man I was ever acquainted with." The bitterest attack upon Asbury and the church of which he was a bishop was made by James O'Kelly, but when O'Kelly lay ill in Winchester, Virginia the bishop went to see him. The Journal reads, "We met in peace, asked of each other's welfare, talked of persons and things indifferently, prayed, and parted in peace. Not a word was said of the troubles of former times." Facing the moment of truth, what united was more important than what separated the two men.

Asbury's concern for the widow and orphan never varied. The untimely death of John Dickins, scholar and first publishing agent, left the family in need. Asbury accepted personal responsibility for their plight. He visited the Orphanage founded by Whitefield in Georgia and praised it highly. One of the most moving scenes in his life, according to the opinion of many, was during his recovery from illness in the winter of 1798 when for several days he wound broaches of cotton with the children and talked with them.

Asbury was always raising money for something or someone, a church, a school, ill or underpaid preachers, but when a sixty year old black woman, who supported herself by picking caskum, said she was distressed on his account and brought him a French crown when he had not three dollars with him, he refused: "I will not take money from the poor."

At Uniontown, in 1789, he reflected, "God is about to work in this place. Many people are alive to God, and there are openings in many places." The next line reads, "I wrote a letter to Cornplanter, chief of the Seneca nation of Indians. I hope God will shortly visit these outcasts of men and send messengers to publish the glad tidings of salvation among them."

Pathetic families on Braddock's road or pushing toward Cumberland Gap toward the new state of Ohio drew his sympathy and caused him to reflect upon how much they endured, "men, women and children, almost naked, paddling barefoot and barelegged along." "A man who is well mounted will scorn to complain of the roads when he sees them." . . . "We must take care to send preachers after these people." His mind was beset with concern for those who had never heard the one, only and everlastingly Good News. He was the living embodiment of the Church as the Extension of the Apostolic Witness. In March of 1797, because of illness and weakness due to exposure and exhaustion, the preachers in Tennessee urged him "to make the best of the way to Baltimore and not to ride in the rain." He accepted their advice, adding, "I AM PECULIARLY CONCERNED FOR THE CITIES; THE PROSPERITY OF THE WORK OF GOD DEPENDS MUCH ON HAVING PROPER MEN FOR ANY AND EVERY PART OF THE WORK." The work of God in the cities stirred him to think of the people on the frontier; the work of God on the frontier reminded him of the growing need of abler leaders for the cities.

The importance of leadership was on Asbury's mind from the moment that he landed at Philadelphia on an October Sunday in 1771. Forty-four years later, November 12, 1815 Asbury preached on the signs of a faithful ministry, using as text Acts 26:17-18. "Sinners must be preached to with energy. Ministers must be sent; be qualified for this mission; like Paul, be convinced, convicted, converted and sanctified. Like him they must be preserved from the violence of the people, but especially from their indulgence and flatteries." The aged and ailing Bishop, coughing his life away, had but four months of life left to him. He used it up to the last breath to witness to a mighty Saviour. Charles Wesley's verses set forth Francis Asbury's purpose, prayer and performance.

O thou who camest from above,
The pure celestial fire t' impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its fount return
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus confirm my heart's desire
To work and think and speak for Thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.

Ready for all Thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death Thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

FRANCIS ASBURY: FOOTPRINTS ACROSS THE NEW JERSEY ISTHMUS

by

JOHN H. COFFEE, JR.

The mysterious ways in which the Lord works to perform His wonders are still unfathomable to finite man! Who could possibly imagine that the blacksmith son of a British gardener would become the major figure in American Methodism? On August 20, 1745, in the parish of Handsworth in Staffordshire, England, near the foot of Hampstead Bridge, Francis Asbury made his entrance into this world that would one day, more than two hundred years later, declare him a "wonder for Christianity and for Methodism."¹

At the Bristol Conference in 1771, John Wesley declared, "Our Brethren in America call for help." The twenty-six year old Francis Asbury, like the Biblical Samuel, replied, "Here am I; send me." With these words, the feet of Asbury were directed toward the new world, where they left his "Footprints Across the New Jersey Isthmus" many times. Within three weeks, Asbury took leave of his parents, visited his friends on the circuits he had served, and prepared to sail from Bristol.

The day of the landing at Philadelphia was October 27, 1771. Methodism at this time was a loose and wobbly structure in America. Asbury had expected to find some beginnings of Methodism in America; some Methodists were waiting for him at Philadelphia that fall of 1771. After enjoying a few days of becoming acquainted in Philadelphia, being entertained in the home of Francis Harris, and preaching many times, Asbury departed for New York. This was the first of many round trips that he was to make between these two cities over the paths of New Jersey. "The imprints of Asbury's horses' hoofs upon the New Jersey soil were deep and frequent, but the imprint of Asbury's message and ministry upon the lives of the people of New Jersey can be measured only in eternity."²

The first record of Asbury's preaching in New Jersey is found in his JOURNAL dated November 6, 1771. "I went to Burlington on my way to New York, and preached in the court house to a large, serious congregation. Here, also, I felt my heart much opened."³ According to the JOURNAL, Asbury preached in Burlington more often than any other place in the

¹ Elmer T. Clark, ed., July 16, 1792, THE JOURNAL AND LETTERS OF FRANCIS ASBURY, 1:720.

² F. B. Stanger, J. H. Coffee, Sr., THE METHODIST TRAIL IN NEW JERSEY, p. 4.

³ Clark, OP., CIT., November 6, 1771, 1:8.

state. His JOURNAL records forty-two times that Asbury visited Burlington. The first time was November 6, 1771, and the last time was June 22, 1815.

Bishop Asbury and Bishop Coke presided over the first conference of the Methodist Church to be held in the state at Trenton in 1789. Asbury conducted the second conference at Burlington on September 27, 1790.

Francis Asbury did not overlook any town of any size in New Jersey. While Asbury was an effective preacher and evangelist, his gifts were even more outstanding as an organizer. Francis Asbury is the man chiefly responsible for the vigorous growth of Methodism in New Jersey. As soon as he had new converts, Asbury would form them into a class and teach them how to help each other grow in grace. This class meeting system was one reason for the rapid growth of Methodism. Under Asbury's leadership, in less than two years (1771-1773), the number of Methodists grew from approximately thirty to more than two hundred.

Not only did Asbury play the role of architect, but he became involved in many places as a director of financial campaigns. On one journey along the eastern part of New Jersey, Asbury tells us that he "rode a dreary, mosquito path, in great weakness, to Batsto works."⁴ Asbury recognized the need for a church in this place so these iron workers could hear the message of God. He records that on Sunday, September 11, 1791, "I advised the people to build a house for the benefit of those men so busily employed day and night, Sabbath not excepted, in the manufacture of iron—rude and rough, and strangely ignorant of God."⁵ It was at Aura, New Jersey, (originally known as Union), that he did more than advise the people to build a church. On April 12, 1809, Asbury "preached at Union Chapel; it is a neat building, two stories high, forty by thirty-six feet, built on the plan I furnished them."⁶ On Wednesday, June 13, 1798, he writes, "We came to Hutchinson's; and on Thursday to New Brunswick; where I bore feeble testimony, and drew up a subscription for the purchase of a house for divine worship."⁷

Asbury's name was found on many of the deeds of the early churches. At Bethel Church, Hurfville, it is recorded that "The land was deeded to Bishop Asbury in 1794."⁸ His name is also on the indenture for "Old Stone Church" which is located five miles northwest of Swedesboro, and his name is first on the list for the land conveyed by Jeremiah Smith and wife of

⁴ IBID., 1:695.

⁵ IBID., September 11, 1791, 1:694.

⁶ IBID., April 12, 1809, 11:596.

⁷ IBID., 11:161.

⁸ Stanger, OP. CIT., p. 149.

Philadelphia for the use of the Methodists of Crosswicks to erect a meeting house.⁹

At least three communities of New Jersey have been named for Francis Asbury. One changed its name some years ago. The other two still continue to honor Francis Asbury by carrying his name. All three of these communities have active United Methodist Churches today. "The Methodist Society in Repaupo, originally the community of Asbury, had its origin in a class composed of members of the Old Stone Meeting House."¹⁰

The community of Repaupo, which at one time had been called "Asbury" is a few miles southwest of Paulsboro, New Jersey. Along the Atlantic Ocean is a summer resort called Asbury Park. Mr. James A. Bradley of New York City moved to Ocean Grove soon after the organizing of the Camp Meeting there in 1869. Because he was broken in health and in need of rest, he bought two lots in the seashore, tent city. At the same time he bought a large tract of land north of Ocean Grove. This tract of land was named "Asbury Park" in honor of Bishop Francis Asbury.¹¹ The other community in New Jersey named for Asbury and still in existence is in the north western part of the state, east of Phillipsburg, New Jersey. The community was originally called "Hall's Mills." ". . . in 1790, through the instrumentality of Colonel William McCullough, a member of the revolutionary army, it was changed to Asbury, New Jersey, becoming the first town in America to bear the honored name of our pioneer bishop."¹²

The name of Asbury has been perpetuated by many more churches than communities. The communities that have named churches after Asbury are Swanton, Woodstown, Pleasantville (now merged with Salem United Methodist Church), Merchantville, Atlantic City, Camden, English Creek, Long Branch, Trenton, and Cinnaminson. These are all in the Southern New Jersey Conference. In the Northern New Jersey Conference there are Asbury United Methodist Churches in Asbury, Cokesbury, and Mount Bethel. The churches in Asbury, New Jersey, and Cinnaminson, New Jersey, were in existence during the life of Asbury. Concerning the one in Cinnaminson, it is written, "During the year of 1811 Bishop Asbury, traveling on horseback, met with a small group of Christians in Cinnaminson and formed the Asbury Church."¹³

Asbury became the guest in the homes of many of the residents of New

⁹ IBID., p. 244.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 179.

¹² Vernon Boyce Hampton, ed., 1957, NEWARK CONFERENCE CENTENNIAL HISTORY, p. 35.

¹³ 159 ANNIVERSARY BOOK: CINNAMINSON, ASBURY, p. 4.

Jersey. Among the names of homes in which he stayed and preached are Stephen Carcalow, Daniel Bates, David Blackburn, Isaac Budd, John Budd, Jonathan Bunn, Jesse Chew, Axail Coates, Captain Covell, Phillip Cressy, John Early, Samuel Fiedler, John Goff (Gough), Samuel Hewes, Fuller Homer, Hugh Hollinshed, John Hughes, Joseph Hutchinson, John Murphy, Joseph Newkirk, Joseph Newman, Squire Price, Simon Pyle, Thomas Todman, Jacob Snyder, James Sterling, Thomas Tapers, James Throckmorton, John Throckmorton, Turner (John or Benjamin), Peter White (whose farm was on ground now occupied by the Ocean Grove Tabernacle), and David Woodmansie.¹⁴ Without these men and many others, it would have been impossible for Asbury to do the work that he did for Methodism in New Jersey. There could be a background story told about each of these men if space permitted. Your church may have had its beginning because of one or more of these men.

One of the very prominent facts that stands out in Asbury's JOURNAL is that he gave himself fully to the work of God. In so doing in all kinds of weather and circumstance, his life was filled with weariness, pain, and sickness. His was not an easy life nor one that sought the comfortable way. The following portions quoted from his JOURNAL came within a forty day period. These facts are typical of his life.

"On Friday night (May 15, 1772) I was heavy afflicted; and dear sister Wilmer took care of me. The next morning, through the mercy of God, I was something better, and preached in the evening."¹⁵ "Friday, 22. In the morning I rode home in great pain; but after dinner went ten miles down the river."¹⁶ "Monday, 25. Was unwell, but went to Burlington, and preached in the evening though very sick."¹⁷ "Tuesday, 26. Found myself very unwell in the morning; but visited a prisoner under the sentence of death."¹⁸ On June 4, 1772 and June 16, 1772 similar experiences are recorded. "Tuesday 23. (June 23, 1772) . . . and though very weak, weary, wet, and low, while it rained very hard, I preached with some power . . ."¹⁹ These experiences are repeated over and over. These examples were all taken from his experiences a few weeks before Asbury was 27 years of age. One other experience that happened fifteen years later is recorded under the date of June 22, 1787. "I preached at the stone church (Johnsonburg) after riding upwards of thirty miles: we then rode until ten o'clock in the night through a heavy rain. I was much tired in body and mind: I had nothing to eat but a little

¹⁴ Robert B. Steelman, ed., 1965, THE METHODIST TRAIL, pp. 16, 16.

¹⁵ Clark, op. cit., 1:30, 31.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁸ IBID., p. 32.

¹⁹ IBID., p. 34.

bread and milk, and that made me sick."²⁰ One of the longest periods of illness that came to Asbury was in Lumberton, New Jersey. On Sunday, April 24, 1814, Asbury states, "I preached at Penns Neck, at Salem, and at Cohansey Bridge. I preached also at Pitts Grove. We may say that when we are weak, we are strong in the strength of God: yea Lord, thou art our strength! I preached at Union chapel, and the Lord gave power to his own truth. I preached at Bethel. We had a rainy day, and my flesh failed. I rested at Daniel Bate's, greatly spent with labour. We should have failed in our march through Jersey, but we have received accommodations. I return to my journal after an interval of twelve weeks. I have been ill indeed, but medicine, nursing, and kindness, under God, have been so far effectual, that I have recovered strength enough to sit in my little covered wagon, into which they lift me."²¹ Azail Coate cared for the bishop during this serious twelve week illness. "The Coate home is a small stucco house at the intersection of the Medford-Lumberton road and the Springville road."²² This house is still standing. "Henry Boehm aided in taking care of Bishop Asbury during this severe illness . . . and asserted that the bishop 'never fully recovered from that sickness, and he was physically unfit to go round his diocese again.' But we find the indomitable Asbury traveling rapidly westward as he commenced the round of one of his longest tours."²³ On Thursday, June 20, 1815, Asbury was at the home of James Sterling in Burlington. This was his last time in the state. Asbury thus begins his ministry in New Jersey in the city of Burlington, and he also closes his ministry in New Jersey in the city of Burlington.

Just as John Wesley had no peer in British Methodism, Francis Asbury had none in American Methodism. Francis Asbury the father and organizing genius of Methodism in the new world holds first place as the builder of American Methodism.

²⁰ IBID., p. 544.

²¹ IBID., II:755, 756.

²² Steelman, OP. CIT., 1966, 17.

²³ Clark., OP. CIT., II:n 755.

ASBURY AS A PREACHER

by

ANDREW CHRISTIAN BRAUN

(Bishop Francis Asbury was the first trustee of Broad Street United Methodist Church. This article is dedicated to Bishop Prince Albert Taylor, Jr., who preached here just 200 years later, on December 13, 1970).

Like the beat, beat, beat, not of the tom tom but of a metronome, there occur in "The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury" (Abingdon Press), the phrase, "I rode", "I preached", "I was very unwell." This man was either one of the world's great hypochondriacs or he was one of the most heroic victors over ill health the world has ever known. He proved himself to be the latter. The first bishop of the Methodist Church was not the most brilliant; he had his faults, but he was the master practitioner of holy purposes until the end of his life. In this paper I want to restrict myself to Asbury as a Preacher.

I. THE GOSPEL WAS THE HEART OF HIS MESSAGE

At the outset of his ministry, on shipboard, coming to America from England, on October 13, 1771, Asbury preached the last of a series of sermons. All of the texts recorded in his Journal preached on ship-board have to do with a phase of salvation. Forty-four years later, feeble in body, the aged bishop came to Father Staunton's on the Saluda River close to the borders of North and South Carolina. On Sunday, November 19, 1815, he preached on Acts 26:18, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." This sermon still had the idea of salvation, personal and yet worldwide in scope, which always was the epitome of his preaching.

Francis Asbury knew and used the Bible in a most wonderful way considering the fact that he had very little formal education. He also read many other books and injected the ideas in his sermons. His ability to use Latin, Greek and Hebrew, is proof that the multiplied thousands of miles he rode on horseback turned the saddle bags into a university library. The Journal shows that Asbury preached on most books from Genesis to Revelation. We are thankful for the Journal which gives us the remains of his preaching. Unfortunately for Methodism the entire collection of his sermons outside the Journal, was lost in the Publishing House fire of 1836.

Constantly traveling, by horseback, chaise, or afoot, sleeping in the

open or in frontier cabins, under ceaseless pressure of administrative duties, presiding over hundreds of Annual Conferences, and over preachers' meetings, yet Asbury found time for reading, study and contemplation. Often he preached the Gospel to thousands in great camp meetings but at other times to a score of blacks in a little pioneer church. Always he was Christ's preacher of the Gospel.

II. THE GRADATIONS OF HOMILETICS WAS HIS METHOD

Quite often in his Journal he gives the outline of his sermon. Because he outlined his sermons with careful use of text and context, he has my admiration. Homiletics is the science of adopting sermons to the spiritual needs, capacities and conditions of the congregation. Asbury knew how to do this. In his preaching the skeleton stuck out! He told his congregation where he was going. Before the congregation turned the corner of Asbury's thinking, he flashed a green light so that they were ready. Asbury never made his introductions too long. He never raised more rabbits in his sermon than he could run down! However, Asbury demonstrated that most souls are saved AFTER twenty minutes! The length of a sermon is a relative matter. Sitting on a hot stove for a few seconds would seem like an hour but sitting for an hour with one's lover would seem like a few seconds. To present the claims of the Lord Jesus takes time Asbury believed. Billy Graham today normally preaches far more than twenty minutes. Andrew W. Blackwood is correct when he says that the hearer is likely to remember the sermon as long afterward as the preacher has been thinking about his subject before preaching it. Asbury thought long and hard about his sermons. And he always carried his congregation toward a verdict—he always tried to get them to do something or believe something.

Reflecting on Asbury I wonder if our modern preachers are as homiletically oriented. Perhaps today our churches are better organized than they are pulpitized! Often preachers are bent on saying something instead of having something to say. Preaching ought to be the event in which the Biblical text is interpreted to give meaning to the concrete situation. For Asbury preaching was not just a habit but a happening. Asbury through the wonder of homiletics led people to hear "His Master's Voice."

III. GOOD-NEIGHBORLINESS WAS HIS HELPFUL PRACTICE

For Asbury the sermon was not only to be remembered but translated. For Asbury the sermon was a manifestation of the Incarnate Word taken from the written Word by means of the spoken word and translated into the Living Word. The sermon for Asbury was truth incarnate in a person.

The Journal makes plain that Asbury loved people, rich and poor,

ignorant and learned, prisoner and free. He was at home equally with the crude frontiersman and the successful businessman. On Lawrence Street, near Borad Street United Methodist Church in Burlington, is the grave of James Sterling. He entertained Methodist preachers in his hospitable home. Among them was Bishop Asbury, the first trustee of Broad Street Church. Sterling kept a general store at the corner of High and Union Streets. He was awakened by the preaching of Asbury and joined the Methodist Class under Captain Webb. Bishop Asbury guided this layman to great Christian usefulness.

Asbury was a bachelor without a home all his life, yet he was at home in the backwoods clearing or in the plantation mansion. Frequently ill, brought on by exposure and hardship, in swamp and thicket, he was nursed in various homes of those who loved him along his route. Several times Asbury said that all the money in the world could not induce him to pursue such a hazardous life except for the fact that the Master called him. His salary as a bishop was \$64 a year yet he often gave his last dollar to help a suffering family. He loved people and could shell peas with a housewife and at the same time instruct her little boy in English grammar. Wakeley in "Heroes of Methodism" tells us that Asbury found great joy in visiting Christian families. There he became gay; "For," said he, "if I were not sometimes gay with my friends, I should have died in gloom long ago." His gaiety came, in part, from the fact that he practiced "loving one's neighbor as one's self."

IV. GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS WAS THE HOPEFUL CONSUMMATION

Asbury travelled by horseback in his lifetime 275,000 miles, many more than John Wesley, and over pioneer roads. He traversed from New England to Georgia, from the Atlantic Ocean to Ohio. For him "the field is the world." He never saw his parents after arriving at twenty-five on the American continent. He established his headquarters in the saddle. And to this day Methodism has no general headquarters for its episcopal leadership. Asbury was an itinerant preacher of the New World, an itinerant bishop rather than a prince residing in a priestly palace.

He was God's great preacher until the end. In the Spring of 1816 "I can recall his friends lifting the old bishop from his carriage at the door of a church in Spottsylvania County, Virginia." There as it turned out, he preached his last sermon. Too weak to stand, he preached in a sitting position. His text was, "He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness." Thus the homeland prophet of the long road delivered his valedictory message and finished his course. Because he had been a faithful preacher of righteousness, Methodism too can claim it has a Saint Francis!

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

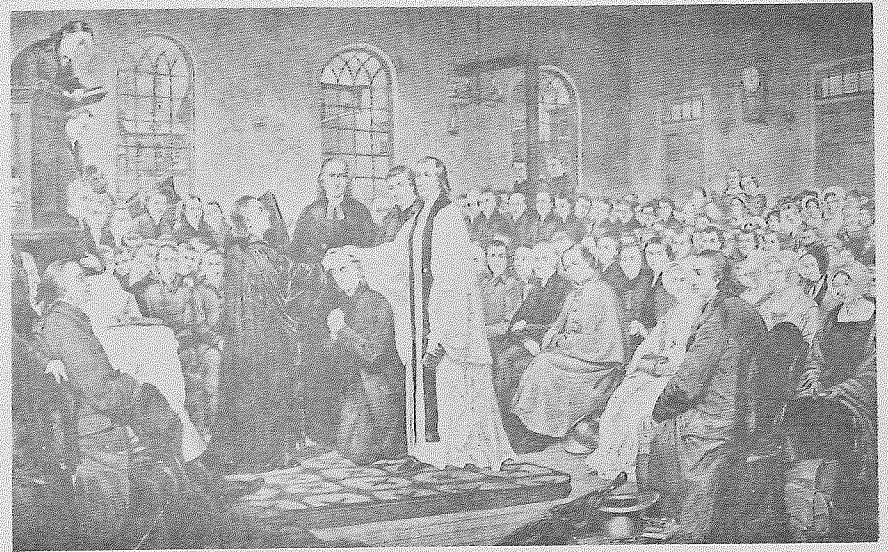
Every Church in the S. N. J. Conference is urged to recognize the Asbury Bicentennial in some significant way, if possible between October 24-November 14, 1971. Set aside Saturday, November 13th to attend the Asbury Bicentennial Banquet in the Broad Street United Methodist Church, Burlington. Bishop Prince A. Taylor, Jr. will give the address.

By the time you receive this, we will probably have our Archives and Library housed in the new Library at Pennington School. Come and see it and use it.

Use our Audio Visuals at the Conference Office, Box 307, Cherry Hill, N. J. 08034. We recently added the feature length film JOHN WESLEY and the new 15 minute version, WESLEY AND HIS TIMES.

You or your friends may become a member of the Southern New Jersey Conference Historical Society by the payment of two dollars annual dues. Please send them to our Financial Secretary, Miss Emily Johnson, 333 West Jersey Avenue, Pitman, N. J. 08071. The Benjamin Abbott Life Membership is fifty dollars. Inquiries are invited concerning it. Churches are also encouraged to become a Life Member of the Society. Our two newest Life Members are Dr. Frederick Maser and Mrs. Robert Moore.





Famous scene in Lovely Lane Meeting House, Baltimore, on December 27, 1784, shows Bishop Thomas Coke (hand upraised), E.U.B. founder Philip Otterbein, and others ordaining Francis Asbury.